TELLS THE FACTS AND NAMES THE NAMES

CounterPunch

DEC. 1-15, 2007 ALEXANDER COCKBURN AND JEFFREY ST. CLAIR VOL. 14, NO. 21

James Brown: The Soul Will Find a Way

By Kevin Alexander Gray

At the start of the 1960s, my father Paul moved my mom Geneva, three older brothers, younger sister and me from Boston to rural Spartanburg County in upstate South Carolina. He'd fled the South in the 1940s, enlisting in the Navy. Twenty years later, he returned to an inheritance of eleven shotgun houses and a juke joint at the foot of a hill in a tiny, segregated, one way in – one way out community called Freyline.

Gray's Grocery was on the sign over the front door between the two round, red Coca Cola logos, but everyone called the gathering spot "the store". Gray's Grocery was where all the maids, janitors, textile mill workers, field laborers, wannabe slicksters, young and old, sinners and saints met on weekends to dance, drink, gamble, talk, cuss, have an occasional scuffle, fist, gun or knife fight, and generally let it all hang out.

If someone came by the house before church needing something for Sunday dinner like flour, lard or whatever, one of us kids would go down the road and open the store for them. Often my dad would open after church. At night, a neon Colt 45 sign in one of the barred windows and a yellow light over the front door were lit up. We not only had a front door – we had a back one as well. The door had ready access to the coal and bottle shed in the back of the building and an escape route when a fight broke out or we had to quickly get rid of illegal contraband such as liquor or gambling items. It was standing room only on weekends. Folks spilled out onto the steps or hung out in the yard, depending on the weather. Dancing inside was close-up.

There are a few theories on how the word funk was born, but I think it originated in places like our store. Those who lived in the rural South in the years prior to the mid-1970s can no doubt imagine what Gray's Groceries was like. Most black communities had a similar place. During the day it was the typical dry goods store. After the work day was done, it was the place to get a beer before heading home, exchange the gossip of the day, get the numbers, complain about white people, and talk about the Lincoln High School basketball team. On weekends, it was the nightclub. My dad would put brown paper bags over the light bulbs that hung from the ceiling to discourage moths and dim the building. The place always had an old smell about it that was a mixture of stale beer, the oily, vinegary scent from the pickled products, coal and the burlap sack it came in, old petrified wood, and the musk of people that worked in the fields, cotton plants or any other job that was dirty. Field workers had a wet, sweaty scent. The "lint heads" who worked at the mill would come during the week covered in cotton dust from head to toe, accompanied by a dry, dusty aroma. In the summer, the building was hot even with both doors open and the two small fans running on high.

On Wednesdays, the Collin's Music man would come by to divide up the money from the jukebox and bring new records. There was always a lot of Brown on the piccolo machine. A perk for our family was the extra copy of "Lickin' Stick" or "Night Train" that the piccolo man would leave us. When a 45 record came off the machine, we got it. He always had to bring an extra disc for Brown's hits because Brown's songs, even the ones released in the late 1950s and early 1960s, were never stale or out of style. What could the man take off? "Think", "Caldonia"? "Out of Sight" was hot well into the late 1960s. And there are no better "slow drag" songs (hip-hoppers call it the "bump and grind") than "Try Me" or "I Lost Someone".

Brown was a constant presence in our store. He was the low country homeboy who made it big. The state of Georgia and the city of Augusta claim him as their hometown hero, and he, too, claimed the state and city. Yet he never moved more than 40 miles from his family's roots in Barnwell County, South Carolina, along the Savannah River, establishing a home on Beech Island in Aiken County, South Carolina, adjacent to Strom Thurmond's Edgefield County home. The earliest recorded account of Brown's kin can be found in the 1860 census records of the James C. Brown plantation. Brown's parents and grandparents are included in the 1930 census records of Barnwell. He was born in South Carolina, jailed here, his last legally questionable marriage was licensed here, and his final resting place is here. Yet throughout his life, he publicly rejected South Carolina but maintained a private connection to the place that was obviously his home. The conflicted relationship with South Carolina is the story of Brown's music and life.

It's hard to bury James Brown. At any moment in a day you'll hear his voice, his name, a beat or a song. A Brown phrase crystallizes a situation like when it's time to leave a room – "it's too funky in here" or when it's time to go to work or party – "you gotta get on the good foot," or when hearing someone being deceitful or stupid – "talking loud and saying nothing." The substance that fed Brown's music won't decompose. For the sake of discussion, let's call it soul power.

Soul power is a connection to the people and their experiences: good, bad and ugly. It means hearing what you feel and feeling what you hear. It's in the call and response like a preacher to the congregation. It can be in one person singing their story alone – like when Otis Redding

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sings "Sitting on the dock of the bay." It's putting the blue note in a plea, a wail, a moan, a holler or a shout. It's about the process of life with all its messiness.

Now, this is not about who has or doesn't have soul. It's about where Brown got his supply. I believe, there is something cosmically black about South Carolina. My belief arises from the fact that the vast majority of African slaves brought to the United States for life on the plantation disembarked on Sullivan's Island – the "black Ellis Island" – just off the coast of Charleston. Brown picked up from the vibes the Africans brought off the slave ships and taken out into the fields. He inherited what they sang about and how they sang it. Plantation slaves subversively sang "Jackass rared, Jackass pitch. Throwed ole Marsa in de ditch…," while Brown sang "you can't tell me how to be the boy when you know I'm grown."

The Roma or black Gypsies also settled among and intermixed with the Africans in the low country region of South Carolina. Thus a context for Brown's constantly being on the road with his itinerant band of musicians, all decked out in their ornate costumes, living free-wheeling lives.

The African beat and rhythm landed on Sullivan's Island. It rolled down the coast to Edisto Island and traveled up the Savannah River to Brown's neck of the woods. It is not surprising that two of the most profound influences on modern popular black music – James Brown and Motown – can so clearly place their historical pedigrees from the same region. Edisto Island, one of the barrier islands in the low country swamp area, is where escaped African slaves sought refuge from their would-be masters. Edisto is where bass player and Motown Funk Brother James Jamerson found the blue note. Jamerson carried the bottom beat in just about every Diana Ross, Marvin Gaye, Smokey Robinson or Motown tune. In the movie "Standing in the Shadow of Motown" Jamerson is quoted as telling a friend he made his first musical instrument by stretching a rubber band on a stick and sticking it into an anthill so he could "make the ants dance." It is easy to imagine Brown, the young songwriter, reminiscing on his childhood, recalling a day he sat on an anthill and wrote, "I got ants in my pants and I need to dance."

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Some of us wrote off Brown's dissing South Carolina as his not wanting the world to think "the hardest working man in show business" was a country bumpkin. He could justifiably claim Georgia, since his formative years were spent in urban Augusta which, despite the obstacles he would face as a teen, was a slightly better environment than backwater Barnwell. Even 130 years after emancipation, life in rural Barnwell was still pretty much like it was on the plantation. Brown's mother Susie ran away from it in 1936, leaving 3-year-old James with his father, James Joseph Brown Sr. Within the first six years of Brown's life, his dad left the fields to work in the tar plant. From the turn of the century through the 1960s, just about every county had a tar plant. It provided tar for roads, railroad ties, house siding and a variety of other uses. The work was hot, black, hard, nasty, sticky, smelly, dirty and dangerous. Small, impoverished, black enclaves of little tarpaper shotgun houses sprung up around these plants. Chain gang camps were located close by so as to provide county road crews. Families of inmates migrated to these communities.

These small black communities also served big white-owned farms, providing the bulk of work in much the same way as when plantation owner James C. Brown was alive. Every winter a couple of those tarpaper houses burned to the ground in a flash, often taking their occupants with them. The tarpaper would raise the temperature of an already out of control blaze, which took on a blue flame and gave off an oily smell. This is what it was like in Freyline. Jack Dobson's big farm, one of the three large farms in our area, employed many of the men in Freyline. A tar and "criso" wood plant was within smelling distance. Relatives would come through with the county prison road crew and were often allowed to visit with kin while in the neighborhood. James Brown came from just such a community.

With his mother gone and his father working, young James, as he recalled, "was pretty much left alone to roam the backwoods of Barnwell to fend for himself." His childhood might have been as idyllic as playing in the fields or running barefoot behind the older kids, or "no telling" what a young kid alone might have seen or experienced in the woods.

Now, I don't know exactly why Susie ran, and I don't know a lot about James Brown Sr. (James legally dropped the Jr. from his name). Yet before Brown's birth, through at least the 1960s and 1970s, the South was an extremely harsh place for black women. Spousal violence was endemic. Black women didn't have a rung on the social ladder. They were often on the brutal receiving end of black male's anger at his condition and treatment by white society. A black woman had very little protection from abuse unless she had a special relationship with a white patriarch. Or she could resort to the dreaded "ten-cent pop pistol," which was a mixture of hot grits and lye. Black chil-

CounterPunch

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dren, too, were often victims of abuse and a hard life at an early age.

Brown's music came from a raucous and oftentimes violent environment, with all the emotions and contradictions carved into his psyche for better or worse. Maybe Brown was saying something about Susie's life and his when he sang, "when we did wrong papa beat the hell out of us" in "Papa Don't Take No Mess." It surely says a lot about the world I witnessed growing up in rural South Carolina at a time when common law marriages were the norm. Back then, a man could kill a spouse or mate and was protected by laws recognizing "crimes in the heat of passion." Even a black man who killed his wife or girlfriend, if he was fortunate enough to own property or have money, sometimes could avoid jail time or a long sentence for murder. I had one uncle who only did four years on the chain gang for beating his first spouse to death with a 2x4 stud. Another uncle served 12 years on the chain gang for killing "the wrong man" over a woman. My father on occasion would beat my mother. My siblings and I would grab his legs in her defense – two boys to a leg. It was often violent in our home, but he only ran us out the house at gunpoint once or twice. Maybe Suzie Brown was escaping such a life.

Still, there were some hard and fast rules folks lived by. The rules dealing with whites boiled down to staying out of their business beyond work. The worse place a black person could be was in the middle of white folks' business or to have them in the middle of yours. But rule number one within our own community was "stay out of married or grown folks' business" or fights between a man and a woman. My dad warned us early, "When you jump in the middle of a quarrelling couple, they'll end up turning on you." This rule came from the widely held belief that you had to apply violence to get another person to do what you wanted them to do, that physical and psychological violence, fundamental to both slavery and Puritanism, was acceptable and even sometimes encouraged in society. The second rule – don't interfere with a parent whipping their child – often gave relatives, friends, neighbors and school officials the go ahead to physically "correct" their child. The words "I'm gonna beat some sense into you" came right before a whack or slap across the face, a lick upside the head, a butt lickin' – hand or wooden paddle - a whipping or beating. Tree switches – the offense determined the number – were used for whipping and belts or barber straps for beatings. Violence is still condoned today. The threat of violence is often used as a punch line in jokes. In a Bill Cosby comic bit, Cosby chides his son for some transgression saying, "I brought you into this world and I can take you out." The truth of the matter is that the South where Brown and many others grew up in was a very violent place.

Brown continued to live with his father and a host of live-in girlfriends until he was six years old, when his father moved to Augusta. There he left the boy to live with his Aunt Honey on Twiggs Street. Aunt Honey, like Richard Pryor's grandmother, ran a whore house. Living with his aunt no doubt provided Brown with an abundant array of grunts, groans, squeals, and sexual repartee for his songs. In Augusta, he spent more time on his own, hanging out on the streets and hustling to get by. Brown managed to stay in school until he dropped out in the 7th grade. He earned money by picking cotton, racking pool balls, shining shoes, sweeping out stores, washing cars and dishes, singing in talent contests, and buck dancing for change to entertain troops from Camp Gordon.

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In 1948, at around age 16, Brown was sentenced to 8 to 18 years for burglary and armed robbery. He was sent to a juvenile detention center in Toccoa, located in northeast Georgia just over the state line from South Carolina. While in prison, Brown, who played the harmonica, formed a gospel quartet which performed for the local prison crowd and other prisons around that area. During one of those performances, future band mate Bobby Byrd watched the show from outside of the prison gates. Brown later became friends with Byrd when the prison baseball team played Byrd's team. Brown played pitcher, and Byrd played shortstop. Byrd promised to help Brown get out of prison by offering to provide him with a place to live. Byrd's family then helped Brown gain an early release after serving about three years of his sentence, under the condition that he would not return to Augusta or Richmond County, Georgia. By all accounts, Brown failed to live up to the "leave Georgia" terms of his release. After his release, he did brief stints as a semiprofessional boxer and a pitcher in semiprofessional baseball. After a career-ending leg injury, Brown turned his full attention to music.

In 1955, Brown and Byrd's sister Sarah performed in a group called "The Gospel Starlighters." Eventually, Brown joined Bobby Byrd's vocal group, the Avons, and Byrd switched the group's sound from gospel to rhythm-and-blues. Brown's name and story first spread by word of mouth, from community to community. The group changed their name to The Flames and began touring the Southern "chitlin' circuit," eventually signing a deal with the Cincinnati, Ohio-based label Federal Records, a sister label of King Records.

The Flames' first recording in 1956 was the single "Please, Please, Please," which became a number 5 R&B hit, selling over a million copies. Five years later, in 1961, "Please, Please, Please" was still on my father's jukebox, and folks were still slow dragging to it. Hearing someone repeat Brown's plea – "Good God Almighty" – was almost as common as "good morning." The Flames went on to become "James Brown and The Famous Flames." Their music spread from jukebox to jukebox and on to the airwaves. Brown's black-and-white photo on bold lettered black, orange and white live show announcement posters popped up on telephone polls or were tacked to the sides of black country stores, including ours, a couple of weeks before a local gig. Through the posters, we followed and mimicked Brown's hairstyles from process to Afro to process.

Our store was always jumpin' in the

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early 1960s, especially since most southern blacks got their first taste of new music on the neighborhood jukebox. If the weather was clear, you could hear black artists late night on any AM transistor radio beamed in from Randy Radio out of Tennessee. We either bought our records locally from Collin's (the white-owned amusement company) or downtown Spartanburg at Oliver's black-owned drug store. If you had patience and a mailbox, you could mail order from Randy or Ernie Record's out of Tennessee. If you were old enough or knew somebody, you could get in to see Brown at the municipal auditorium or his live club show. Wherever he performed, his records were on sale. Seeing a live show meant going to the XL 100 Club in downtown Spartanburg or driving the 35 miles over to The Ghana in Greenville. The Ghana's house band – Moses Dillard and the Textown Display, featuring a young crooner named Peabo Bryson (now a Disney voice artist) – would often open the show. When grown folks wanted to make a weekend out of it, they drove up to The Bird Cage in Charlotte, or the El Matador down in Columbia, or over to Augusta to Brown's The Third World which he opened in 1962 with co-owner Charlie Reid Sr., whose funeral home ended up doing Brown's last rites. In Atlanta, they could see him at Le Carousel which was located at Pascal's, a restaurant frequented by Martin Luther King Jr. and his cohort, or The Royal Peacock about four blocks from King's church Ebenezer Baptist on Auburn Avenue.

Back then (as now), you heard James Brown every day. Families scheduled Sunday evening television time around seeing him on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Kids would suffer through Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello's 1965 movie *Ski Party* just to see him and The Famous Flames dancing and singing "I Feel Good" by the fireplace in ski sweaters. We joked that James and the Flames were "the only negroes on the slopes" or they were "dancing to stay warm." Still, a whole lot of black boys in the South couldn't wait for winter so they could wear their thick ski sweaters and pistol-legged, shiny, creased "sharkskin" pants. Brown's music was the soundtrack to the black South throughout the 1960s and much of the 1970s. Kids danced "to the rhythm of the James Brown band" at high school basketball games and the dances afterward. Big-thigh drum majorettes bounced down Main Street in the local Christmas parade to the beat of "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag."

Sometimes, like a gypsy, be it on the Southern "chitlin' circuit" or playing Las Vegas, New York or Europe, Brown entered the theater through the backdoor, got his money up front and in cash, put on a show, sold some records, left out the back door, and split town on the "night train." At other times, he mingled with the people and occasionally took some along with him. Brown worked with hundreds of local musicians and workers during his years on stage. Every kid who played a horn dreamed of being on stage with the James Brown band. "Maceo, blow your horn" and "Play it, Fred" were as much a part of the slang of the day as Brown's "hit me" or "good God." Boys either wanted to play the trombone like Fred Wesley or the sax like Maceo Parker. Wesley and Parker probably influenced more kids to join their local high school bands than any one else during that era.

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The 1960s are when Brown is credited with creating the music genre now called "funk." Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" which came out in 1965 was followed by "Money Won't Change You" and "Cold Sweat." Yet songs like "Don't be a Drop Out" and "Money Won't Change You" revealed Brown's social consciousness. He followed up the anti-dropout song by touring schools, sponsored by then Vice President Hubert Humphrey, donating scholarship money and performing a benefit concert in Mississippi in 1966 for the wounded activist, James Meredith.

Brown was the go-to guy after Martin Luther King Jr. was killed. Brown went on stage in front of thousands of black kids at the Boston Gardens on April 5, 1968, the night after King delivered his "Mountaintop" speech to hundreds at Mason Temple in Memphis. As word spread across the country of King's murder, instead of canceling his concert, Brown arranged to televize it with the belief that people would rather watch him perform than riot. From the stage, he counseled his fans not to destroy their own community in anger and to respect King's memory.

King preached against the Vietnam War in life, and Brown stepped into the breach after his death. In June 1968, two months after Memphis, Brown took an integrated band featuring Marva Whitney, Tim Drummond, Clyde Stubblefield, Jimmy Nolen, Maceo Parker and Waymond Reed to Vietnam to help ease the still raw racial tension among the troops over King's death. He originally offered to go at his own expense to head off the Lyndon B. Johnson-led government from using cost as an excuse for denying his trip. Even though the government ultimately picked up travel expenses, Brown lost hundreds of thousands of dollars in canceled stateside shows to make room for a predictably dangerous trip. Brown and his crew performed deep "in country" where Bob Hope dared not go. When Brown arrived in Saigon, my elementary school bus driver Eugene "Blue" Boyce, drafted right after high school, was alive to greet Brown and his band. Yet "Blue," like so many young men, never made it out of Southeast Asia as he was killed in September later that year. Brown's prominence in the aftermath of King's death did not go unnoticed, as his face appeared on the cover of *Look* magazine in 1968, with the captions – "Is this the most important black man in America?"

For the most part, public school desegregation in the late 1960s meant the closing of black facilities and the layoff of scores of black teachers. It meant black kids entering a system and culture that was universally assumed to be better than what they were coming from. Blacks integrated a white situation, not vice versa. Yet, as the official policy of segregation ended, the black children that walked through the schoolhouse doors weren't serenely humming "We Shall

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Overcome." "I'm Black and I'm Proud" was their anthem. It was everywhere. It was at our store. It was in the streets. It was on the jukebox and radio. It was in the air, as my sister Valerie and I entered all-white Fairforest Elementary School in 1969. Saying it was often accompanied by a clinched, pumped fist – down low, subtle, yet subversive, or up high, defiant and proud.

For some, "I'm Black and I'm Proud" was an announcement of newfound black pride. It straightened out those who confused the demand for equal rights as whites with a desire to be white. Not that I ever heard any black wishing out loud to be white. For those like me, it was simply calling ourselves what we were already calling ourselves. We were saying to white people that there was nothing wrong with being black. Brown knew the difference between "I'm black and I'm proud" and "I'm black but I'm proud." Neither "Negro" nor "Colored" were terms ever in contention to be the response to Brown's call. The African slaves were called black. Even as Negro became Colored, became Negro again, and white southerners mangled nigger and Negro to come up with their acidic "nigra," black was and remains the only term accepted with little argument on any side. Without a doubt, "I'm Black and I'm Proud" settled the self-identification debate for many. Even in the era of the African-American tag, there's no shaking black – because Brown made it cool to be black.

The 1970s were my pubescent, teenage years. Things where changing for me and the folks around me. Tension around full-scale school desegregation and busing occupied our minds. The protest against the Vietnam War was having an effect. You could be a part of either the "peace and love," the Black Panther movements, or both. The heroin epidemic hit the black community. My oldest brother, who had volunteered for the army in the early 1970s at the tail end of the Vietnam War, narrowly escaped be sent to Southeast Asia. What he didn't escape was the heroin addiction he picked up while stationed in Germany. Brown's 1972 song "King Heroin" spoke to my brother's and many others predicament.

Many of the artists of the 1970s took on the turbulent times. The Temptations sang it was "A Ball of Confusion." Curtis Mayfield sang "Mighty, Mighty (Shade and Whitey)" and "If There's Hell Below (We're all gonna go)." Brown went from cementing racial identity to promoting racial uplift to leading the black sexual revolution with songs like "Sexy, Sexy, Sexy" and "Sex Machine" with its refrain – "shake your money maker." Before there was Tone Loc's nineties' hit "Baby's Got Back," there was Brown's "Hot Pants! (Smoking)"

Brown made bad good and then declared himself "Superbad." He was "Soul Brother Number One" even as black "peace and love" groups like Frankie Beverly and Maze, Kool and the Gang, Earth, Wind and Fire came on the scene with a more laid back sound. Sly and the Family Stone, The Ohio Players and George Clinton and Parliament Funkadelic built on the funk foundation of Brown's "Give it Up or Turn It Loose", "Can't Stand It" and a host of hits. As Curtis Mayfield and Marvin Gaye smoothly laid out the politics of war and race in their music, Brown shouted, "Get on the Goodfoot" and "Papa Don't Take No Mess!"

When Aretha was crowned the "Queen of Soul," Elvis the "King of Rock and Roll," and Frank Sinatra was named the "Chairman of the Board," Brown proclaimed himself the both the "King" and "Godfather of Soul," and we accepted it without a fuss.

Brown didn't let anyone, including the black nationalists, tell him who to be. He was often labeled a "black capitalist", but it was deeper than that. Brown believed he and other blacks had a stake in America through the dues his parents and grandparents paid through years of toil. That's what songs like "Say It Loud," "Open Up the Door," "Payback" and "Funky President" spoke too. King spoke of a "promissory note" and a "bounced check." Brown sang, "I don't want nobody to give me nothing. Open up the door and I'll get it myself." And, "you can't tell me how to run my life down and you can't tell me how to keep my business sound…, you can't tell me how to use my voice…" – all lines in "Talkin' Loud and Saying Nothing." In that song, Brown was talking to black nationalists, white racists, politicians and the person next door. But the message was the same – James Brown called his own shots, and if you can't tend to your own business, don't try to tend to his.

When he and Sammy Davis Jr. endorsed and had their pictures taken with Richard Nixon in late 1960s, we forgave them both. At least I did. My mother had a copy of Davis' biography *Yes I Can* that I read as a boy. The title said it all. A few blacks heckled Brown at a couple of concerts with the chant, "James Brown – Nixon's clown," but it wasn't widespread, it didn't last long, and it didn't stick.

Brown's flirtations with Nixon may have had something to do with how the democrats treated Fannie Lou Hamer and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party back in 1964 at the Democratic National Convention in New Jersey and the years after, when she ran for office. But most believe that it had more to do with him and other blacks getting the opportunity to buy up AM radio stations in the late-1960s. With greater access to the airwaves, Brown's music, along with Gaye, Mayfield, and The Staple Singers – played on black-owned stations – helped set the mood of the 1970s. And the stations did more than play music. They were lifelines. They informed their listeners on issues, mobilized them around election time, and connected them to black folks' doings outside their communities.

The 1980s were tough on Brown. Like many, I took his presence for granted although, when he appeared in *The Blue Brothers* film in 1980, I went to the theater to see him as the Reverend Cleotis

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Published twice monthly except July and August, 22 issues a year.

1- year hardcopy edition $45
2- year hardcopy edition $80
1- year email edition $35
2- year email edition $60
1- year email & hardcopy edition $50
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Brown – shouting, sliding and dancing behind a pulpit, with an inspired congregation to match his energy and Chaka Khan leading the choir. And, for me, the only part of the 1985 movie *Rocky IV* worth seeing is Brown singing "Living in America." Yet, beyond a couple of bright spots in the 1980s, many of us moved away from Brown's music.

In 1988, Brown was convicted and sentenced to six years in a South Carolina prison for carrying an unlicensed pistol, assaulting a police officer, along with various drug-related and driving offenses. From what I have been able to gather, no drugs were found on Brown's person – only what was alleged to be in his blood system – at the time of his arrest. So, his conviction amounted to a "blue-light violation" – refusing to pull over for the cops. A 19-year-old white man, in court on the same day as Brown, charged with a second offense of the same violation, received a suspended sentence.

Brown died on Christmas day, December 25, 2006, at the age of 73. The night before the Augusta funeral, Michael Jackson made a late night visit to C.A. Reid's Funeral Home. The "King of Pop" spent a little more than an hour alone with Brown after his body had been prepared for the next day's trip downtown. Upon seeing Brown in repose, Jackson softly quipped, "He didn't wear his hair like that." He then, according to a couple of workers, proceeded to fix Brown's coiffure, taking his fingers poofing out his bangs so that Brown's new hairdo was a bit freer and parting his hair the way he remembered. The workers fretted as Michael mussed up the Godfather's newly pressed "process," one man saying to the other, "We cannot let James go out with his hair looking like that." After Jackson left, the beautician was called back in. Later that night, Jackson returned to the funeral home to spend a little more time alone with Brown.

When you're listening to Brown, and all that funk – it's an assertion of dominance, mastery, cool and an absolutely fierce expression of need, satisfied and arising again, over and over as long as we're alive. Freedom is connecting with the life force – soul, and the struggle to keep it glowing, keep the coals or "Bodyheat" hot, when everything in the world seems determined to extinguish the embers. Freedom is let loose with a big howl, a scream, or "Eeeee Yowlll!" as Brown would express it. And however it comes out, it always translates to, "No, damn it! I will not be extinguished."

Thank goodness, there's a statue of Brown in his adopted hometown of Augusta, Georgia. His home – South Carolina – ought to erect a statue, monument, or memorial to Brown. But if it never happens, Brown will still always be around. His bottom beats will always drive R&B and Hip-hop. Even though his body rests in South Carolina, his presence is everywhere there's music. His presence is in the middle of the field at halftime at a high school or college football game or in the stands with the basketball teams pep band. It's in George Clinton's beats and Prince's feet. You can't escape Brown. Nor do you want to. "You know you want – Soul Power. You gotta have some – Soul Power. What you need – Soul Power. Give it to me – Soul Power." CP

Kevin Gray is a civil rights organizer in South Carolina. CounterPunch Books will shortly be publishing his new book, *Waiting for Lightning to Strike; the Fundamentals of Black Politics.* He can be reached at kagamba@bellsouth.net.

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